

Book reviews

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Paulo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, London: Pluto Press, 2012. vi + 194 pp. ISBN 9780745332482, US\$95.00 (hbk).

Reviewed by: Rhon Teruelle, *University of Toronto, Canada*

A timely contribution, given the rapid surge of interest in social movements, Paulo Gerbaudo's *Tweets and the Streets* explores the mobilizing role of social media through a qualitative ethnographic study. In 2011, Gerbaudo participated in and investigated the following uprisings: the Egyptian revolution in Cairo; the *indignados* movement in Madrid and Barcelona; Occupy Wall Street in New York. This book, a culmination of his research, interrogates how the activists utilized social media for political gain. Effectively, his use of ethnography allows Gerbaudo to speak of the movements with an insight normally attributed to an "insider"; an important distinction that typifies this research method.

From the outset, Gerbaudo is clear in his opposition to both Shirky's (2008) brand of "techno-optimism" as well as Gladwell's (2010) and Morozov's (2011) "techno-pessimism." So instead of being limited by this paradigm, he proposes "a cultural and phenomenological interpretation of the role of social media as means of mobilisation" (p. 9). More specifically, Gerbaudo explores the role of leadership within contemporary popular movements. Gerbaudo posits that all three movements were not leaderless and instead employed "soft forms" of leadership "which exploit the interactive and participatory character of the new communication technologies" (p. 13). This sentiment runs contrary to public perception, mainstream media propaganda, and even contemporary social movement theories. In other words, Gerbaudo contends that hierarchies *did* exist within the movements that he investigated and provides evidence for his assertion. But perhaps an even bigger contribution to the study of activism is his invocation of the term *choreography of assembly*, which highlights the importance of social media in the formation of a collective aggregation (Melucci, 1996).

Gerbaudo is meticulous in documenting the use of social media in actualizing the *choreography of assembly* in the three movements. However, he is just as quick to point out that "street-level agitation" and oral communication were equally (if not moreso) necessary and effective in bringing together and coordinating countless individuals in the course of the three uprisings. As well, this study includes very few explicit references to the use of mobile technology for communication by the groups. Instead, the use of mobile phones in accessing social media is implied and alluded to continually. In fact, the strong connection between the ownership of smartphones and the use of Twitter in the various uprisings resonates throughout the narrative.

Perhaps the most enjoyable aspect of the book is also what separates it from other academic works. *Tweets and the Streets* is an engaging narrative which is written in a

style suitable for academics and nonacademics alike. It does not necessarily read like a scholarly book, but rather, as a story detailing one individual's thoughts, experiences and analyses of three distinct uprisings. Maybe one cannot judge a book by its cover. But in this case, Gerbaudo's story is indeed as appealing and unique as the cover suggests.

References

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Melissa Gregg, *Work's Intimacy*, Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2011. xii + 205 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-5027-2, ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-5028-9 (pb).

Reviewed by: Ma. Rosel S. San Pascual, *University of the Philippines, Philippines*

In *Work's Intimacy*, Melissa Gregg draws our attention to the impact that online technology brings to our contemporary professional and personal lives as she presents evidence from her periodic interviews of 26 Australia-based participants from various levels of workplace hierarchy. The setting of her book is timely as it describes our current generation which has been raised in a society where professional growth is considered as a significant fractional measure of an individual's fulfillment.

One major contribution of Gregg's work is her underscoring of the contradiction that online technology brings to our present-day professional and personal lives. On the one hand, Gregg recognizes that online technology enables us to be free from the temporal and spatial constraints of traditional work practices as it affords us the opportunity to work anytime and anywhere. This allows us to pursue professional advancement even while working at a more convenient time and place which, in principle, frees us to follow other pursuits that ideally leads to greater opportunities for developing other aspects of our personal lives. On the other hand, Gregg reminds us that, online technology is likewise freeing our work from temporal and spatial constraints, thereby allowing it to intrude into our personal time and space. In effect, online technology is unwittingly permitting work to be persistently present in our lives.

Importantly, Gregg also emphasizes that work is not only an organizational circumstance but a social experience as well. She presents evidence of how e-mail and Facebook practices, for instance, characterize "presence bleed" (p. 2), as individuals constantly maintain and negotiate professional and social relationships within and outside the gradually ambiguous border of on-and-off-duty space. Thus, not only does online technology allows work to be persistently present in our lives, it is also inadvertently providing a platform for us to be continuously at work.

Nonetheless, even while Gregg speaks of contemporary reality, her current pool of evidence only captures the situations of those who are in a largely networked society—those segments of the population who are located in networked environments. This raises the question of whether those who are on the fringes of the networked world are also similarly experiencing such conditions. Moreover, while Gregg accounted for individual, social, organizational, gendered, generational, and technological aspects of presence bleed, factors such as race, ethnicity, and culture, which could also significantly influence the maintenance or blurring of professional and personal boundaries, were noticeably left out. Furthermore, while Gregg admitted that time constraints prohibited her from conducting more extensive ethnographic work, her narrative data could have been better complemented by extended observations of the working and living circumstances of her participants. This could have provided her study with expansive in-depth insights into presence bleed and the factors that contribute to its occurrence. As a final note, as each chapter was designed to offer contextual evidence of Gregg's main thesis, incorporating a critical synthesis at the end of each chapter could have delivered more analytical value.

Be that as it may, the aforementioned limitations do not diminish Gregg's contribution to communication and new media scholarship as her book offers, in a reader-friendly style, a robust literature review as well as a copious accounting and description of first-hand human–technology experiences. Overall, her book is a useful resource for understanding how contemporary technology is redefining the contours of our professional and personal lives.

Rowan Wilken and Gerard Goggin (eds.), *Mobile Technology and Place*, New York/London: Routledge, 2012. x + 240 pp. ISBN 9780415889551, US\$ 140.00 (hbk).

Reviewed by: Oliver Leistert, *Universität Paderborn, Germany*

Mobile Technology and Place investigates the important redefinitions and reconstructions of place and space afforded by the almost ubiquitous mobile media technologies surrounding us. The book, organized into four parts, seeks to develop a “fuller, critical understanding of the intersections and interconnections between mobile media use and notions of place to understand what significance both elements have for understanding and living in the digital age” (p. 18).

Part I offers an introduction to the entanglement of networked mobile technologies and place, where the editors outline the scope of the problem for mobile media studies scholars. They note that the concept of place has been debated in the field of human geography, showing that it entails nature and culture alike, and further an ensemble of materiality, meaning, and practice. In addition to these complex and heterogeneous parts, place is seen as fluid, dynamic, and temporary. The editors argue for a relational understanding of place opposed to the rather static euclidean concept of space, acknowledging that the two cannot be separated since technologies such as GPS frame place within their static axiomatic space regime. In his chapter, Jeff Malpas offers a thoughtful reflection on “the place of mobility” about an often overlooked effect, namely how processes of

individualization and subjectivation constitute place, subject, and positioning. As Richard Ek points out in his contribution, topological understandings of spatial systems are always political, and place-making processes are ontological renegotiations set in motion by mobility and mobile technologies. Overall, Part I of the book has outstanding contributions which offer the theoretical nucleus to understand the construction of place.

Part II “Media, Publics and Place Making” goes into *medias res*, featuring an ethnographic case study of wireless gaming in Japan and Paris, and discussing the “urban dynamics of net localities.” Part III “Urbanity, Rurality, and the Scenes of Mobiles” opens with a case study of north Australian connectivity problems and their effects on the construction of localities, followed by a rare case study of mobile social networking of “have less” Chinese students migrating to Shanghai and how they produce and renegotiate their family ties with mobile technologies. Part IV focuses on “Bodies, Screens, and Relation of Place,” incorporating integral concepts such as body and the problem of the mobile screen into the discussion.

As the book draws to an end, the reader is offered a discussion of other critical metaelements including Gerard Goggin’s discussion of political encodings of place and Francesco Lapentás’s important study of the normative regime imposed by algorithmicity onto everyday mobile culture.

This edited collection bravely opens the Pandora’s box of theoretical and conceptual problems to engage with in the coming years of mobile media studies. At the same time, it shows that so far no canonical concepts have evolved in this field and that many theorists borrow from established disciplines, most prominently, human geography. While most contributions are outstanding, the general composition of the book remains a bit opaque and it is not entirely clear if the four-part structure is helpful to the reader. Furthermore, the book lacks a deeper discussion of infrastructures, which in their static set up are the counterpart to mobility and fundamentally enable the processes discussed in the book.

In sum, this book is a prime resource and excellent initial investigation of one of the most basic concepts for mobile media studies. Its main merit may well be a recapitulation of the broader theoretical discussion of concepts of place, with a long-term significance that will not be outdated too soon.